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## RHAGES WARE

ALTHOUGH Persian poetry of the Middle Ages—the poetry of Omar Khayyam, Sadi, and Firdusi—has long since met with general appreciation, the art of the same period has not yet been accorded the popularity which it merits. This is strange as it reflects so delightfully in the more varied means at its command all those qualities that are admired in the poems—the lustrous charm of color, the smooth and flexible sense of form, and the naïve fullness of invention. The ceramics have been more and more appreciated of late, and, in particular, Rakka ware, which has appealed especially to the collectors by its iridescence and charming, but not intrinsic, patina of age. Rakka is the oldest ware in the history of the mediæval ceramics of Nearer Asia, going back for its beginnings to the ninth century. It was made in Mesopotamia, the center of culture, from the earliest times, in the Nearer Orient.

But in Rakka ware the ceramics of this period had not yet reached the highest development. This, as in literature, took place in Persia, where Rhages and Veramin, the main centers of the industry, produced decorated wares of a superior order, that is to say, with figure representations, together with the customary conventional ornament. This figured decoration is quite characteristic, no use having been made of it in Syria, Mesopotamia or in Egypt at the same period.

The date of the production of this faïence of Rey or Rhages, one of the most splendid cities of the Orient in the Middle Ages, situated not far from Teheran, may be roughly given as about 1200. Rhages was destroyed by the Mongols in 1221, and Veramin, known especially for its beautiful luster tiles, succeeded at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth to the importance of Rhages.

Of these very rare pieces of Rhages ware, the Museum has acquired by purchase several examples of the two known types

in luster and in unglazed colors. Of the latter class, one piece is a gift from Mr. Dikran G. Kelekian. The most beautiful piece is a luster bowl, (fig. 1), in perfect condition, decorated with Cufic inscriptions on the outside and on the inside with figure designs achieved by the simplest means. Of less perfect technique, but interesting in design from their more simple personal feeling, are three unglazed pieces (figs. 2-4) decorated in rich flesh colors with representations of horsemen and seated figures. Two of these (dm.  $8\frac{3}{8}$  in. and  $6\frac{1}{16}$  in.)\* are the largest known in public collections. The Berlin Museum has recently acquired one bowl very similar to the third one.

The compositions on these pieces of Rhages ware well illustrate the narrow range of the emotional life of the Persian, the simple contrast between two sentiments that has been reflected in Persian art and literature throughout hundreds of years. On the one side there is the pleasure in adventure and combat in the warlike life of the men; on the other, the pleasure when the strife and toil is done—of music, wine, poetry, and companionship enjoyed in the cool shade of pleasant blossoming gardens. This is a contrast that we find in the poems of Firdusi and Omar Khayyam. Sometimes the interest in the two sides of life is shown in one work; for example, in the hunting carpets which, although they were made mostly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, go back in ideas to older motives. There is a carpet in the possession of the Museum that shows fierce combats between animals and in a central medallion the hunters resting in a garden listening to lute players. As a rule, however, the two interests are separated. Thus, one of the Museum's bowls (fig. 2) shows horsemen riding forth to battle while another (fig. 1) represents two figures dressed in flowered robes, seated in a garden on either side of a cypress tree, engaged in conversation, while fish swim in the little pond at their feet.

W. V.

\*One figure in each has been restored.

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FIG. I  
LUSTER AND COLORED BOWL  
PERSIAN, THIRTEENTH CENTURY  
(SEE ARTICLE ON RHAGES WARE, P. 66)



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

POLYCHROME BOWLS  
PERSIAN (RHAGES), ABOUT 1200